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FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC  
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA

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SUBJECT: CHINA AND RUSSIA MAKING THEIR PITCH TO EAST INDIA

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: DEMONSTRATING GREATER CHINESE EFFORT AT PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN EAST INDIA, ON FEBRUARY 12, FOREIGN MINISTER LI XHAOXING TRAVELED TO BIHAR TO INAUGURATE A NEW MEMORIAL HALL AT THE HISTORIC SITE OF THE ANCIENT NALANDA UNIVERSITY. A WEEK EARLIER, CHINA'S AMBASSADOR TO INDIA USED THE OPENING OF A PHOTO EXHIBIT ON TIBET TO ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR A NEW CHINESE CONSULATE IN KOLKATA IN 2007 AND HIGHLIGHTED A NUMBER OF CULTURAL PROGRAMS PLANNED FOR THE EASTERN REGION. THE RUSSIAN'S TOO ARE SHOWING MORE INTEREST IN PUBLICIZING THEIR "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP" WITH INDIA. ON JANUARY 31, THE RUSSIAN CONSUL GENERAL IN KOLKATA HELD A LUNCHEON MEETING, THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN RECENT MEMORY, TO SPEAK ON THE RESULTS OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S JANUARY VISIT TO INDIA. FOLLOWING THE PREVIOUS VISITS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE LEADERS TO NEW DELHI, THIS INCREASE IN PUBLIC OUTREACH APPARENTLY REFLECTS A GREATER EFFORT BY BOTH CHINA AND RUSSIA TO ENGAGE WITH INDIA BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE DELHI DIPLOMATIC CIRCUIT. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) ON FEBRUARY 12, CHINESE FM LI XHAOXING INAUGURATED A NEWLY RENOVATED XUANZANG (HIEUN TSANG) MEMORIAL HALL AT NALANDA UNIVERSITY. NALANDA IS THE SITE OF THE ANCIENT BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY, WHICH THE CHINESE MONK XUANZANG VISITED 1,300 YEARS AGO. AN ADDED ATTRACTION IN SUPPORTING THE UNIVERSITY IS THAT NALANDA IS IN BIHAR STATE CHIEF MINISTER NITISH KUMAR'S CONSTITUENCY AND THE CM HAS BEEN SEEKING TO REVIVE IT AS A NEW, MODERN INSTITUTION. TRAVELING WITH THE FM WAS A 110-MEMBER DELEGATION, INCLUDING CHINESE BUDDHIST MONKS WHO RECITED PRAYERS DURING THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY. KUMAR HAS PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED COMMITMENTS OF SUPPORT FROM THE SINGAPORE AND JAPANESE GOVERNMENTS AND WAS HOPING ADDITIONAL CHINESE FUNDING WOULD MAKE NALANDA AN INTERNATIONAL STUDY CENTER.

¶3. (SBU) EARLIER, ON FEBRUARY 6, CHINESE AMBASSADOR TO INDIA SUN YUXI VISITED KOLKATA TO INAUGURATE A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBIT ON TIBET. STANDING WITH WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE, SUN ANNOUNCED THAT AS AGREED DURING PRESIDENT HU JINTAO'S NOVEMBER 2006 VISIT TO INDIA, INDIA AND CHINA WILL OPEN NEW CONSULATES ON A RECIPROCAL BASIS IN GUANGZHOU AND KOLKATA. THE NEW CHINESE CONSULATE WILL START OPERATION IN 2007 AND INITIALLY WILL BE RUN OUT OF A HOTEL UNTIL SUITABLE OFFICE SPACE CAN BE FOUND. SUN SAID THAT FINANCING WAS NOT AN ISSUE AND THAT

HE WAS MEETING MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (MEA) OFFICIALS TO FINALIZE DETAILS.

14. (U) THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION, "PRESENTING AUDIENCE REAL SITUATION OF TIBET (SIC)" WAS PART OF A SERIES OF CULTURAL EVENTS THAT THE CHINESE HAVE PLANNED FOR EASTERN INDIA. THE EXHIBITION INCLUDED 296 PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY 100 PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES WHO TRAVELED 3,000 MILES THROUGH TIBET AND THE SHENZHEN AUTONOMOUS REGIONS BETWEEN JUNE 25 AND JULY 10, 2006. THE PHOTOGRAPHERS TOOK AROUND 15,000 PHOTOGRAPHS THAT SHOWCASED THE LANDSCAPES, PEOPLE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TIBET. THE PROJECT WAS SPONSORED BY THE INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE CHINESE STATE COUNCIL.

15. (SBU) ANOTHER PLANNED EVENT FOR LATER IN 2007 IS A MOTOR RALLY FROM KOLKATA TO KUNMING IN CHINA'S SOUTHWEST YUNAN PROVINCE. THE RALLY WILL USE THE STILWELL ROAD (BUILT BY THE U.S. ARMY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR) THAT CONNECTS THE CITY OF LEDO IN ASSAM TO KUNMING VIA BURMA. SUN SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS WORKING TO REVIVE THE ROAD AND ADDED THAT THE RALLY WILL ESTABLISH THE SECOND ROAD CONNECTION BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA, FOLLOWING THE OPENING OF THE NATHU LA PASS IN 2006. (NOTE: NATHU LA PASS BETWEEN SIKKIM AND TIBET HAS SEEN ONLY LIMITED LOCAL TRADE AS THE GOI HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO FULLY OPEN THE BORDER, BECAUSE OF SECURITY CONCERNS AND FEAR OF BEING SWAMPED BY INEXPENSIVE CHINESE CONSUMER PRODUCTS. END NOTE.)

16. (SBU) WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER BHATTACHARJEE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE WAY INDIA-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONS WERE EVOLVING. AS AN OLD COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST) (CPM) STALWART, A PARTY THAT FAVORED CHINA -- RESULTING IN THE SPLIT WITH THE RUSSIA-LEANING CPI, BHATTACHARJEE WAXED NOSTALGIC OF THE EARLY DAYS OF BONHOMIE BETWEEN INDIAN PRIME MINISTER JHAWARLAL NEHRU AND CHINESE PREMIERE ZHOU EN LAI, AND OF PANCHSHEEL AND THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT. HE CONCEDED VAGUELY, "IN THE EARLY '60S, WE HAD A FEW UNFORTUNATE INCIDENTS. BUT THOSE DAYS ARE OVER AND I AM VERY HAPPY AT THE DIRECTION INDIA-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONS IS TAKING." REFERRING TO

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INDIA'S "LOOK EAST POLICY," THE CM FURTHER REMARKED THAT HE HAS URGED PRIME MINISTER SINGH TO FORGE A BEIJING-NEW DELHI AXIS. "THE U.S. WANTS A UNIPOLAR WORLD. BUT WE CANNOT LET THAT HAPPEN," HE SAID.

17. (SBU) THE RUSSIANS ARE SHOWING MORE INTEREST IN PROMOTING THEIR MESSAGE OF THE INDO-RUSSIAN "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP" AS WELL. ON JANUARY 31, RUSSIAN CONSUL GENERAL VLADIMIR LAZAREV HOSTED A LUNCHEON FOR LOCAL DIPLOMATS, BUSINESS PEOPLE AND OFFICIALS TO HIGHLIGHT THE RESULTS OF PRESIDENT PUTIN'S JANUARY VISIT TO INDIAN. LAZAREV COMMENTED THAT ASIDE FROM THE HISTORIC MILITARY LINKS, RUSSIA WAS VERY INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THE COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIP, NOTING THAT EVEN IN EAST INDIA THERE HAVE BEEN DEVELOPMENTS SUCH AS A NEW URAL TRUCK FACTORY AND WORK ON A POWER STATION IN BIHAR. LAZAREV'S EVENT WAS UNPRECEDENTED AS RUSSIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY HAS BEEN SOLEMN IN RECENT YEARS. THE RUSSIAN CONSULATE'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OFFICE UNTIL JUST A WEEK AGO HAD BEEN DISPLAYING ON ITS STREET SIDE DISPLAY BOARDS, OLD BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS OF SOVIET VICTORIES IN WORLD WAR II AND HAPPY PEASANTS WORKING ON 1950'S FARM COLLECTIVES. THOSE PHOTOS HAVE NOW BEEN REPLACED BY BRIGHT COLOR SHOTS OF PRESIDENT PUTIN WITH INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MANMOHAN SINGH.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: THE RECENT STATE VISITS OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN AND CHINESE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO AND THE INCREASED ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIA BY CHINA AND RUSSIA APPEARS TO BE FILTERING DOWN TO THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL IN EAST INDIA. THE EFFORT AT OUTREACH IN STATES LIKE BIHAR AND WEST BENGAL, AREAS OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THE DISCUSSION OF A RISING INDIA, DEMONSTRATES A BROADER FOCUS THAN ON THE WELL-TROD DIPLOMATIC CIRCUIT OF NEW DELHI. CHINA CLEARLY HAS A STRONG STRATEGIC INTEREST IN CREATING A PRESENCE IN THE EAST, WHERE IT SHARES MUCH OF ITS BORDER WITH INDIA. RUSSIA, IN TURN, APPARENTLY RECOGNIZES IT MUST DO MORE THAN COMPLACENTLY RELY ON RESIDUAL COLD WAR-ERA SYMPATHIES IN ORDER TO PROMOTE A STRONGER IMAGE IN INDIA.

